Assignment : Preliminary Findings

Name : Mark Baynes

Student ID : 300112625

Paper : NZSM 471, Jazz Research

Lecturer : Phil Broadhurst

Due Date : 4th June 2009

Introduction into your research project

In an interview with downbeat magazine Mehldau explains to Dan Ouellette, "it's hard to talk about this without coming off as sounding pompous but I have my own voice. Without getting too technical, I have a certain way of approaching melody and harmony that some people might recognise as my own" (In Conversation with Brad Mehldau, 2008)

Brad Mehldau's piano playing is intelligent, harmonically and rhythmically complex and unique on many levels. It is surprising therefore that there are only a handful of academic papers and other documented analysis focused on his music. This research topic is aimed at increasing the body of knowledge on the subject of Mehldau's approach to improvisation and performance throughout his career to date. The researcher is particularly interested in these "technical" aspects of melody and harmony that Mehldau refers to. Can these be understood and applied by others? Or is it a case that Mehldau's music is simply greater than the sum of its individual parts?

Due to time constraints, the researcher hopes to analyse two elements of Mehldau's playing during the period of one academic year. These two contrasting topics are listed below and have been purposely chosen to provide research based on both specifically focused, and also a more general analysis.

1. With particular reference to Radiohead, Nick Drake and the Beatles, what are the harmonic improvisational approaches to Mehldau's adaptation of pop songs? Can these approaches be formalised and applied to other vehicles? This is quite a specific topic and hopes to draw conclusion from analysis of a very small section of music, namely Mehldau's contemporary repertoire.

2. How does Mehldau's performance as a sideman differ from that as a leader? This question is not applicable to the preliminary findings due to word limitations and time constraints.

Directions indicated from your literature review

The literature review contained in the researchers proposal states that there is little published material and analysis on the music of Brad Mehldau. The researcher concluded that a large proportion of this research would be based on transcriptions notated by the researcher. This is still the case, however the researcher found two part-transcriptions (see appendices). The first is half of the solo from 'Exit Music for a Film' (Art of the Trio, Vol 4) and the other 'Paranoid Android' (Largo). Due to the time constraints of the preliminary findings the researcher has chosen to transcribe very specific sections of Mehldau's solos, segments that seem to be the most harmonically complex. The solos referred to above were found electronically from an unknown source on the Internet and were not initially shortlisted for their harmonic interest. It should be noted however that on closer inspection they both contain sections worthy of analysis.

After listening to several albums with Mehldau playing as a sideman there is arguable evidence to suggest that Mehldau negotiates a balance between his own identity, and the identity of the leaders music. However there are also sideman albums that contain Mehldau's strong sonic signature, to avoid falling into the trap of over speculation, it would be necessary to interview Brad Mehldau before any conclusions can be drawn.

Methodology

The researcher has transcribed extracts from the following solos: -

Day is Done (Day is Done, 2005, Nonesuch Records) - 4m22s-5m04s
Dear Prudence (Largo, 2002, Nonesuch Records) – 2m56s-3m20s
River Man (Art of the Trio, Volume 5, 1999, Warner Bros) – 5m10s-5m33s
She's Leaving Home (Day is Done, 2005, Nonesuch Records) - 7m06s-7m39s

The researcher has also transcribed melodic reharmonisation of the following tracks: -

Day is Done (Day is Done, 2005, Nonesuch Records) - 6m34s-7m00s Paranoid Android (Deregulating Jazz, 2000, Warner Bros) – 5m21s-5m46s She's Leaving Home (Day is Done, 2005, Nonesuch Records) - 5m05s-5m30s

The researcher chose transcription as his main method of research; this was aided by the use of a computer program entitled 'Transcribe'. This program has the ability to slow down an excerpt of audio without losing pitch. Computer notation software entitled 'Finale 2008' was used to notate Mehldau solos, a wave editing program entitled 'Peak Pro' was used to extract segments of audio to create a CD included in the appendix.

The procedure for this entire process is listed below:-

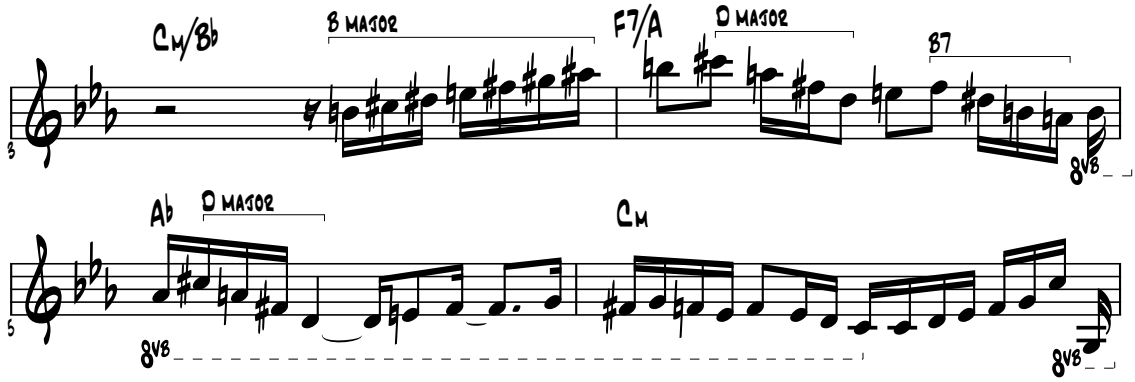
1. Listen to each of the 12 tracks in turn.
2. Shortlist areas of harmonic interest based on the researchers 'active listening' ability.
3. Compare shortlist with each other and briefly analyse excerpts for harmonic reharmonisation. Find the sections that include 'outside' playing over repeated simple changes (there are many).
4. Choose excerpts for full analysis and extract the audio to separate files using Peak Pro.
5. Transcribe the excerpts.
6. Establish the harmony that the transcriptions are played over, use the whole track as a reference if necessary.
7. Analyse the performances outlining interesting features and exemplify in each Finale document.

Findings

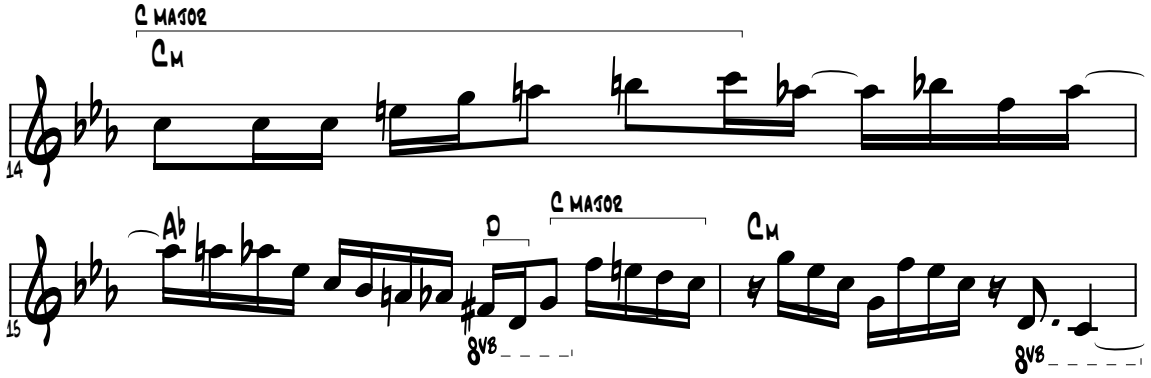
The researcher has chosen particular excerpts based on their harmonic interest and these are listed below.

Day is Done Solo – 4m22s - 5m04s

Bars 3-5 contain interesting harmonic superimposition. B major is implied over a Cm7 chord at bar 3, this is followed by the use of D major and B7 over an F7 harmony and at bar 5 a D major arpeggio is spelt over an Ab chord.



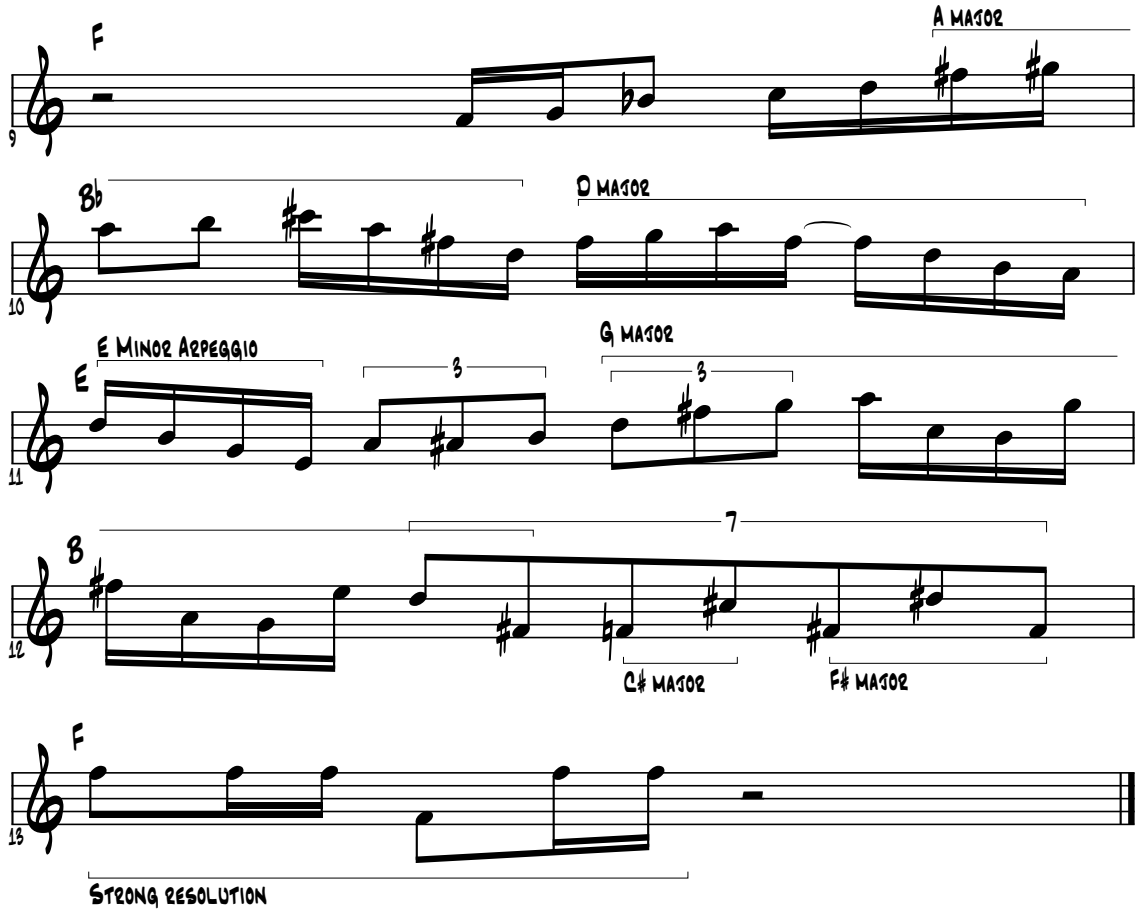
At bar 14 a C major 7 arpeggio is spelt over a Cm chord and at bar 15 a tetra chord in C is found at beat 4.



Dear Prudence Solo – 2m56s - 3m20s

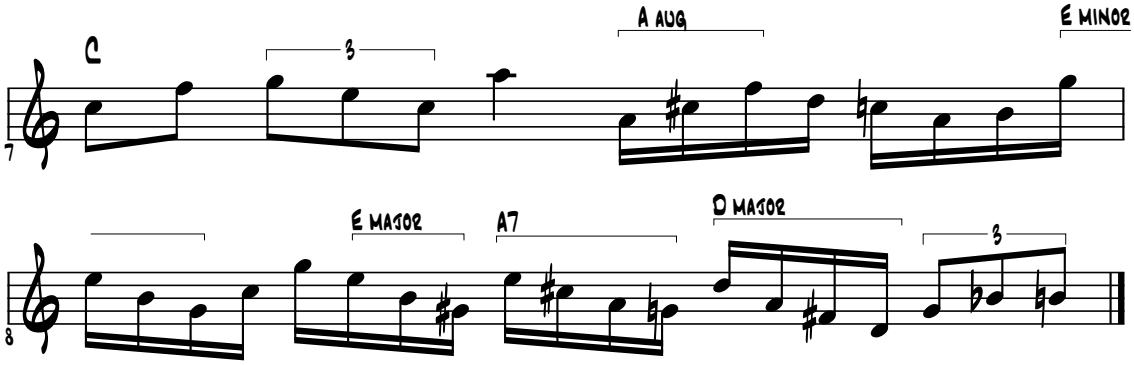
This extract uses a repeated sequence of the major chords of F – Bb – B – E, representing the two tonalities of Bb and E major. During the first 8 bars Mehldau outlines the harmony but just before bar 10 Mehldau plays in A major over a Bb chord. This moves to a D arpeggio 3 beats later and at bar 11 an E minor arpeggio is spelt (relative of G major). For the first half of

bar 12 Mehldau continues to play in G major over the B chord. He resolves to the root of F by implying firstly C# major (the tritone sub of G) and then F# major.



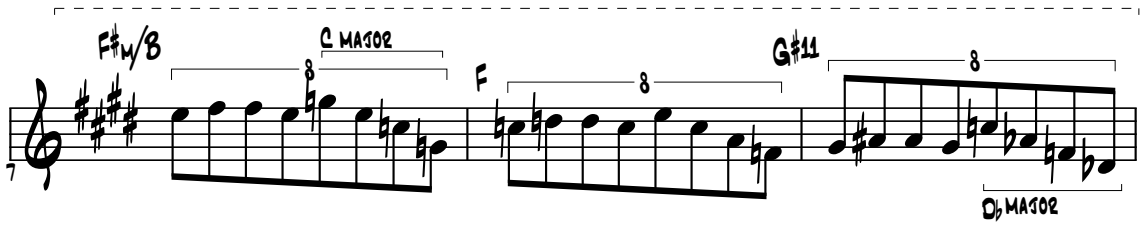
River Man Solo – 5m10s - 5m33s

River Man is entirely based on a 4 chord repeated pattern and for the purposes of these preliminary findings the researcher has chosen to analyse the contents of just one chord, C major. The progression reads Cm – Eb7 – Ab7 – C, Mehldau spells the chord of C major at bar 7 but during the second half of the bar A augmented is implied followed by E minor at the beginning of bar 8. The E minor harmony changes to E major, this in turn moves to an A7 arpeggio, then to a similar line in D and finally rests on the tonic of C minor using a small chromatic run.

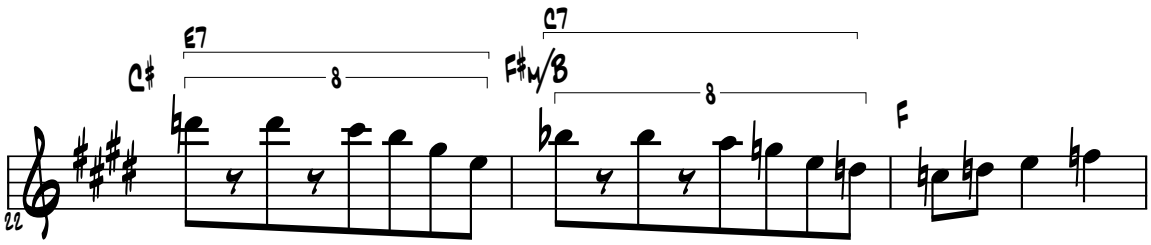


She's Leaving Home Solo – 7m06s - 7m39s

This solo is also based on 4 repeating chords, C# - F#m/B – F – G#11 and is essentially in the 2 keys of C# and F, where F#m/B acts as a V chord in the key of F as a tritone substitute of C. The first harmonic alteration occurs at bar 7, a motif is played over the F#m chord that starts diatonically and moves to its tritone sub as a major chord. The motif is repeated over both the F and G# chords, remaining diatonic until the second half of the G# where a C# (Db) major harmony is implied over the last 2 beats. It should be noted that this phrase is played with a heavily laid back feel.



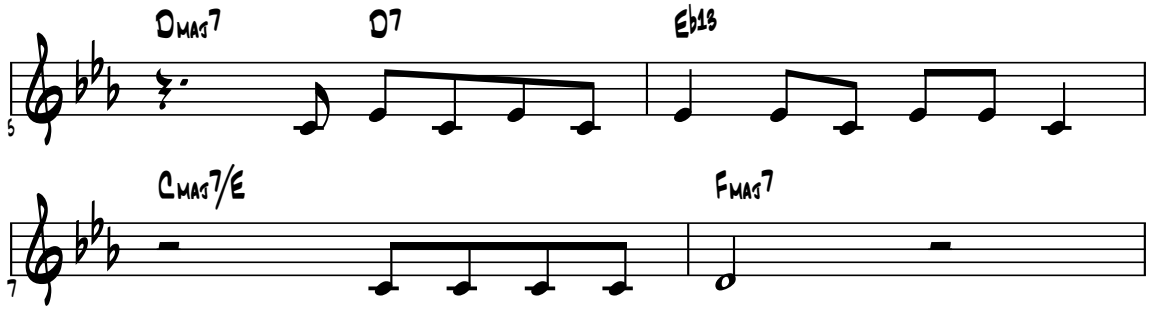
At bar 22 an E7 motif is spelt over the C# tonic which is then repeated down a major 3rd implying C7 on top of the F#m harmony.



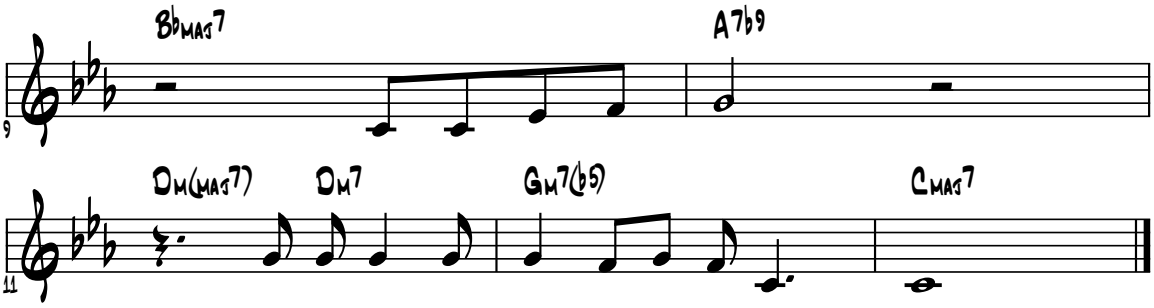
An unexpected result of this analysis was the observation that on three occasions, Mehldau chooses to reharmonise the melody of the head, sometimes quite dramatically. This analysis is summarised below.

Day is Done Reharmonisation – 6m34s - 7m0s

In this reharmonisation the tonality has been shifted from a minor to a major key. The tonic is now C major even though the melody contains and Eb in bar 1 (see appendix). The chord at bar 2 is an Am chord replacing G and at bar 3 there is a return to the original harmony with just the use of a CESH in bar 4 as the bass note descends a semitone. Bars 5-8 reveal a chromatically ascending bassline from a D to an F, over this bassline Mehldau substitutes the Ab with a D (major to dominant) harmony, the Cm is replaced with an Eb13, C major is found at bar 7 replacing Ab and at bar 8 F is substituted for the G7.

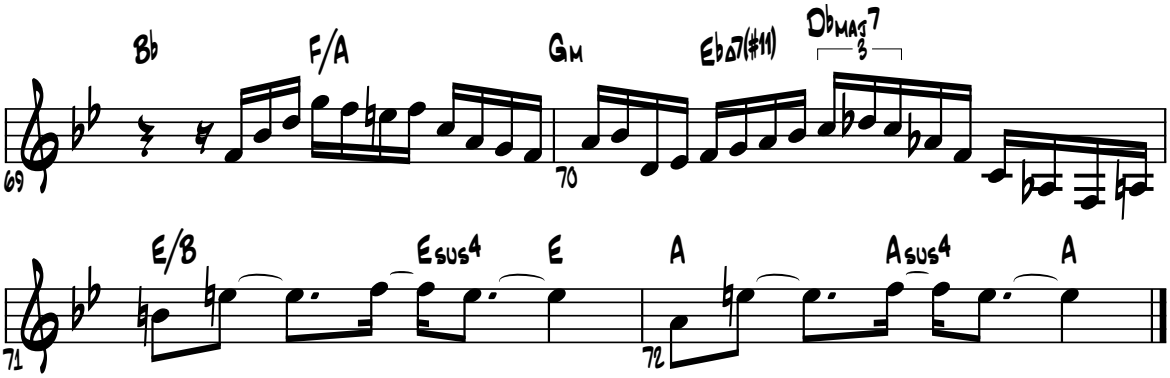


Mehldau uses modal based reharmonisation at bar 9 using a Bb major instead of C minor and at 10 he supports the melody using an A7 instead of G. A D minor chord replaces Ab major at bar 11 and the form concludes with a V – I cadence in the major key, unusually the V functions as a m7b5 not a dominant chord.



Paranoid Android Reharmonisation – 5m21s - 5m46s

At bar 70 Mehldau uses a very simple reharmonisation of Paranoid Android, instead of playing Gm – F he raises the 5th note of G minor a semitone creating an Eb major, this descends down a tone to Db major before returning to the original changes at bar 71. At the same time he also chooses to discard the melody and improvises diatonically over the changes.



She's Leaving Home Reharmonisation – 5m05s - 5m30s

Not included due to word limitation.

Discussion of Findings

One of the elements contained in nearly every extract analysed by the researcher is the use of tritone substitution in one form or another. Bar 4 of Day is Done solo contains a simple B7 arpeggio over an F7 harmony, in Dear Prudence the final 2 implied chords (C# and F#) are both tritone subs of G and C, heading towards a perfect cadence in F major. Tritone use in She's Leaving Home is more inventive as the function of the chord is altered at bar 7 where Mehldau plays a C major arpeggio and also at bar 23 where we find a C7 harmony, both these examples are spelled over an F# minor chord. Mehldau uses tritone substitution at bar 5 and 11 of the Day is Done reharmonisation replacing Ab with D major, D dominant and D minor harmony all at different sections of the extract.

Mehldau takes great liberties with the function of these chords, and his willingness to experiment harmonically can by further exemplified by studying bar 14 of Day is Done. Here Mehldau toys with the listener by

spelling a C major chord over a C minor harmony. This has great effect even though the line isn't supported by any harmony at this time, perhaps the use of a simple repeated chord structure serves to help embed the harmonic progression into the listeners short term memory.

Throughout both excerpts of Day is Done Mehldau essentially plays with 2 tonalities. At bar 3 he quotes a B major scale (almost a scale opposite of Cm7 with just A# being a common tone) then moves to D major (over F7 creating a b9b13 sound), B is stated again at the end of bar 4 but this time acting as a dominant function and finally a D major arpeggio is spelt over the Ab at bar 5. Another occurrence of this dual tonality happens later on over bars 14-15 where the 2 tonalities are C - Ab – C major. This is a very interesting idea, it would be necessary to find out if this is indeed one of Mehldau's approaches, and would serve as a valuable interview question.

Mehldau's almost exclusive use of the cycle of 4ths during the extract of Dear Prudence is interesting as the changes implied during bars 9 -12 completely ignore the harmonic foundation of the solo. Mehldau moves from A major, to D then G major, after which he uses tritone substitution to outline C# then F#, finally landing on F major at bar 13.

A second cyclical example can be found in River Man at bar 8 where E harmony moves to A then D even G is implied at the last beat with the tonic and third spelt as two of the triplets. Another very effective device occurs at bar 8 where the diatonic E minor is changed to an E major sound directly preceding the 4ths-based cadence.

Harmonic liberties are taken at bar 22 as Mehldau changes the C# major harmony into a dominant b9#9 sound. This effect, coupled with a descending motif by a major 3rd at bar 23 serves to produce an exceptionally strong musical statement.

With regards to Mehldau's approach to reharmonisation it can be argued that it has been built around strong bass movement. Bars 5-8 of Day is Done and bar 70 of Paranoid Android clearly support this as the bass ascends chromatically and descends in whole tones respectively.

Mehldau combines the use of modal reharmonisation such as in bar 8 of Day is Done where F Lydian replaces G Mixolydian chords, and at bar 9 where Bb major replaces C minor. Other harmonic liberties worth mentioning in these preliminary findings are the 'minor to major' tonality change of the entire Day is Done reharmonisation from C minor to C major, and also the final cadence at bar 12-13 where G7 is replaced by Gm7b5.

In terms of these preliminary findings the researcher is able to conclude that there is valuable harmonic evidence contained within these extracts, and that the early findings would suggest that Mehldau utilises a number of harmonic systems within his outside playing worthy of further investigation and analysis. Perhaps at this stage is could be necessary to revaluate the methodology slightly to include analysis of any extracts contained in Mehldau's oeuvre that the researcher believes to be 'on topic' in terms of harmonic exploration.

Bibliography

Articles and Interviews

Ouellette, D. (January 2007). *The Mehldau Effect. Downbeat, 74,* 4.

Albums as Leader

Mehldau, B. (1997). *The art of the trio. Volume one / The Brad Mehldau Trio*. Burbank, Calif. :: Warner Bros.

Mehldau, B. (1998). *The Art of the trio, Volume three : songs/ The Brad Mehldau Trio*. Burbank, Calif. :: Warner Bros.

Mehldau, B. (1999). *Art of the trio Volume four : back at the Vanguard / The Brad Mehldau Trio*. Burbank, Calif. :: Warner Bros.

Mehldau, B. (2001). *Art of the trio. Volume 5, Progression / The Brad Mehldau Trio*.

Burbank, Calif. :: Warner Bros.

Mehldau, B. (2001). *Largo / Brad Mehldau*. Burbank, Calif. :: Warner Bros.

Mehldau, B. (2004). *Live in Tokyo / The Brad Mehldau Trio*. [New York, NY] :: Nonesuch Records.

Trio, B. M. (2005). *Day is done / The Brad Mehldau Trio*. New York :: Nonesuch Records.

Mehldau, B. (2008). *Brad Mehldau Trio live*. Milwaukee, WI : [New York, NY] :: Nonesuch Records.

Albums as Sideman

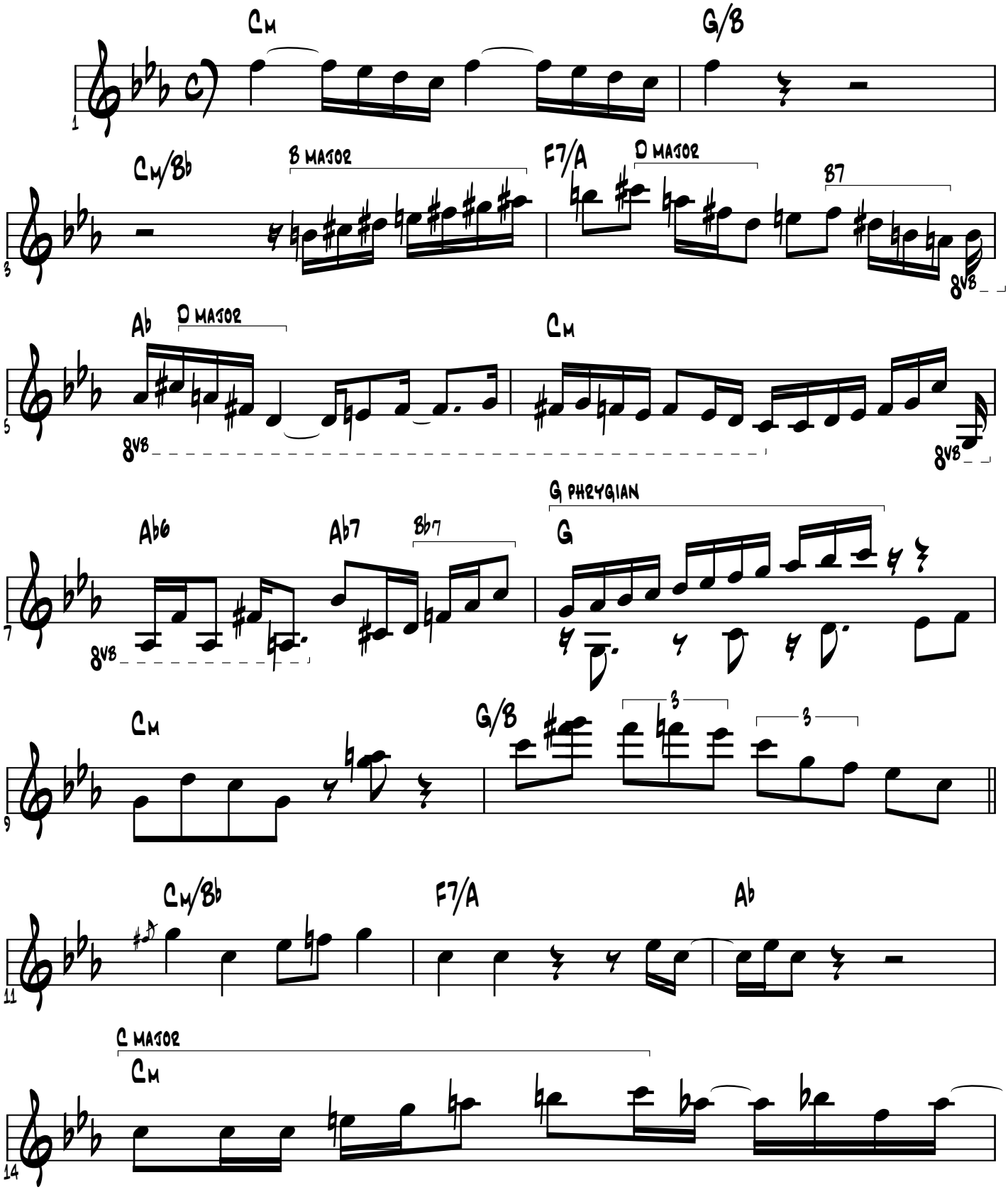
Not applicable to preliminary findings.

Appendix

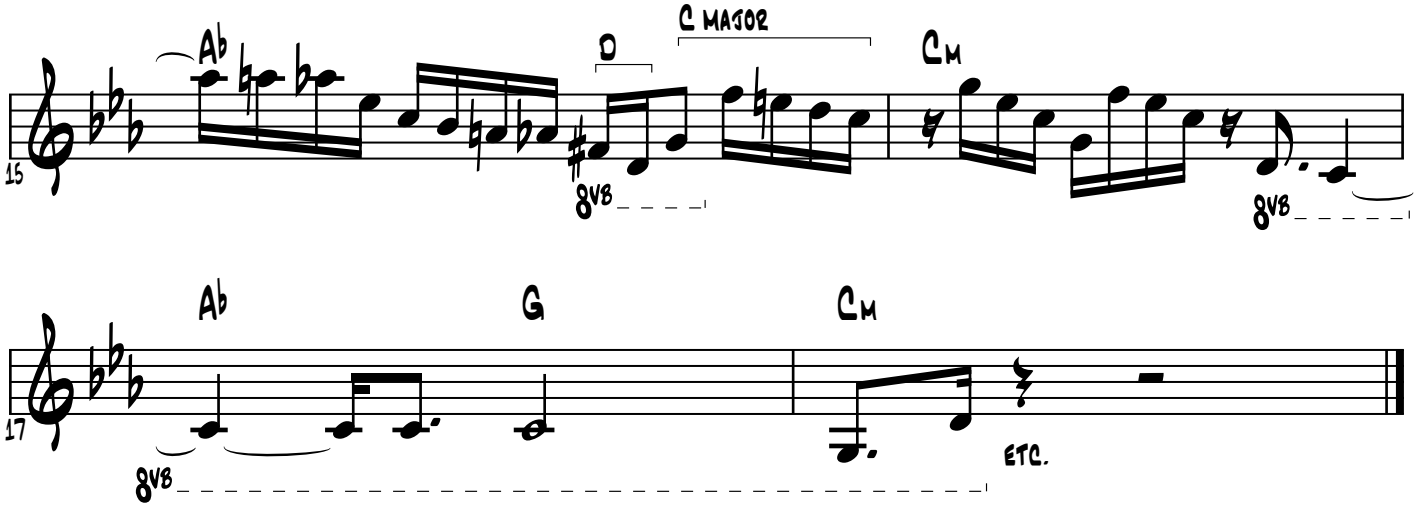
1. Day is Done Solo
2. Dear Prudence Solo
3. River Man Solo
4. She's Leaving Home Solo
5. Day is Done Reharmonisation
6. Paranoid Android Reharmonisation
7. She's Leaving Home Reharmonisation
8. ~~Day is Done (Original Leadsheet)~~
9. ~~Dear Prudence (Original Leadsheet)~~
10. ~~Paranoid Android (Original Leadsheet)~~
11. ~~River Man (Original Leadsheet)~~
12. ~~She's Leaving Home (Original Leadsheet)~~
13. ~~Paranoid Android and Exit Music Transcription (Unknown Source)~~
14. ~~CD containing all excerpts~~

DAY IS DONE SOLO

4M22s-5M04s

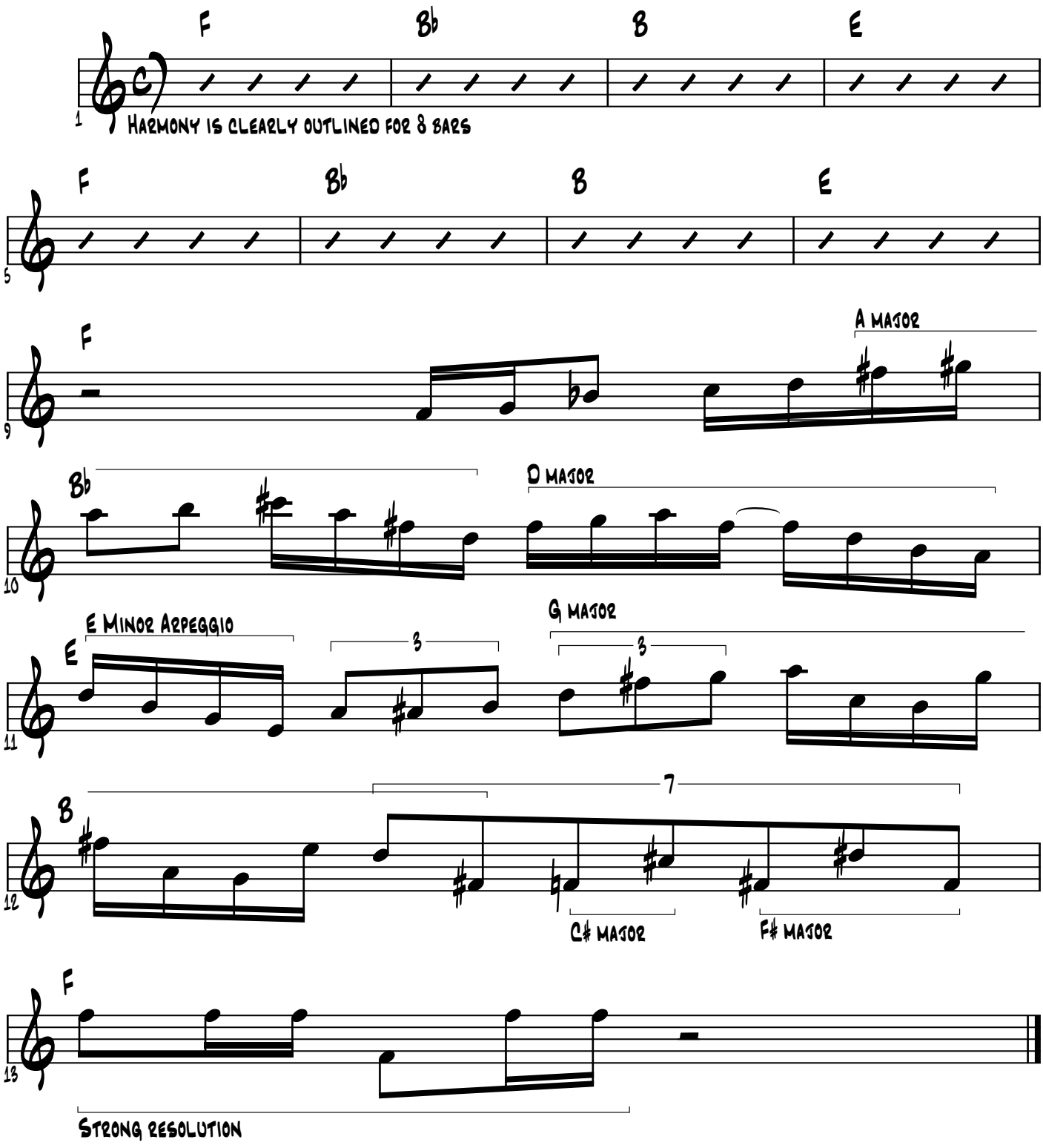


DAYISOONE/SOLO/2



Dear Prudence Solo

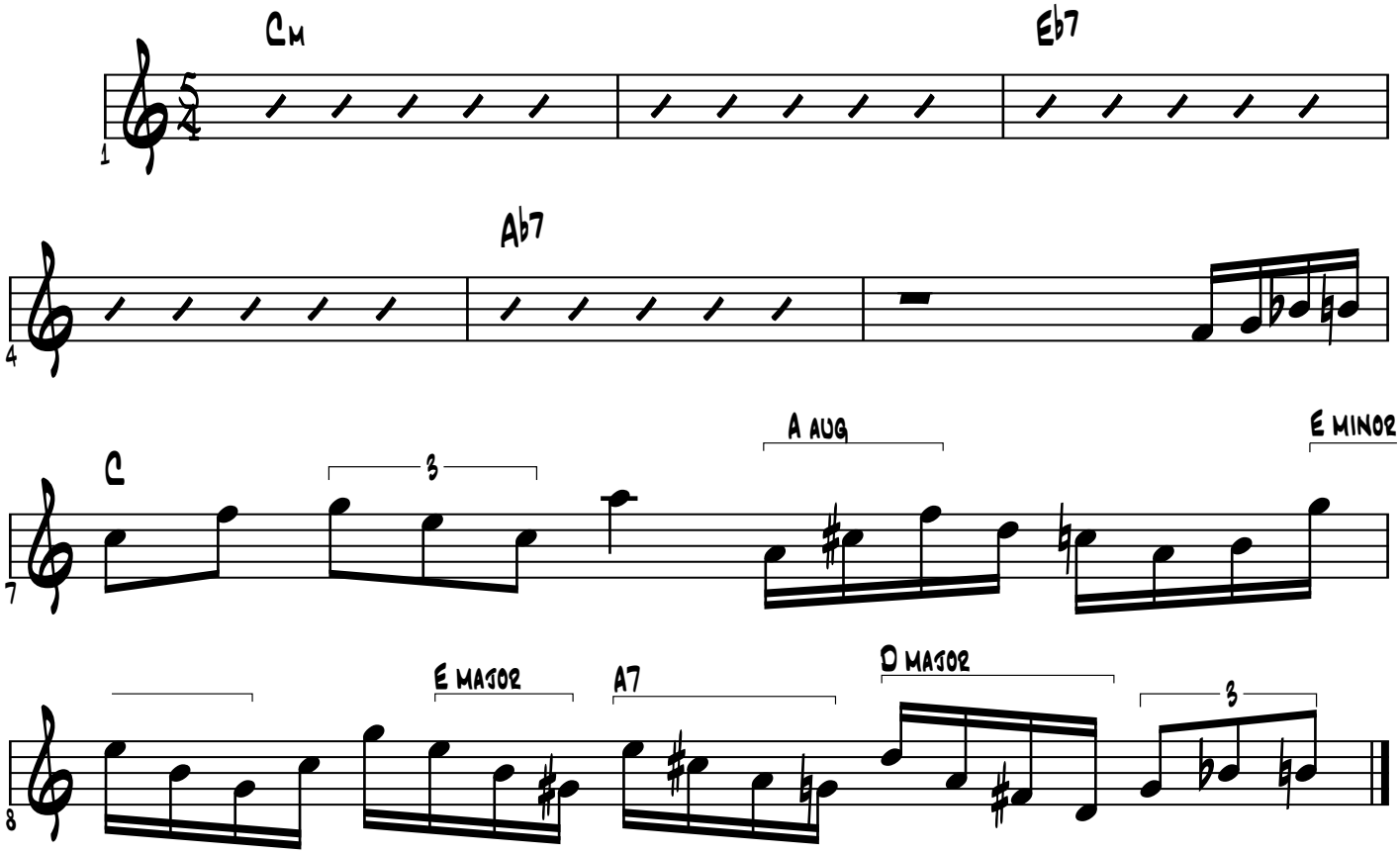
2m56s-3m20s



Appendix 3

River Man Solo

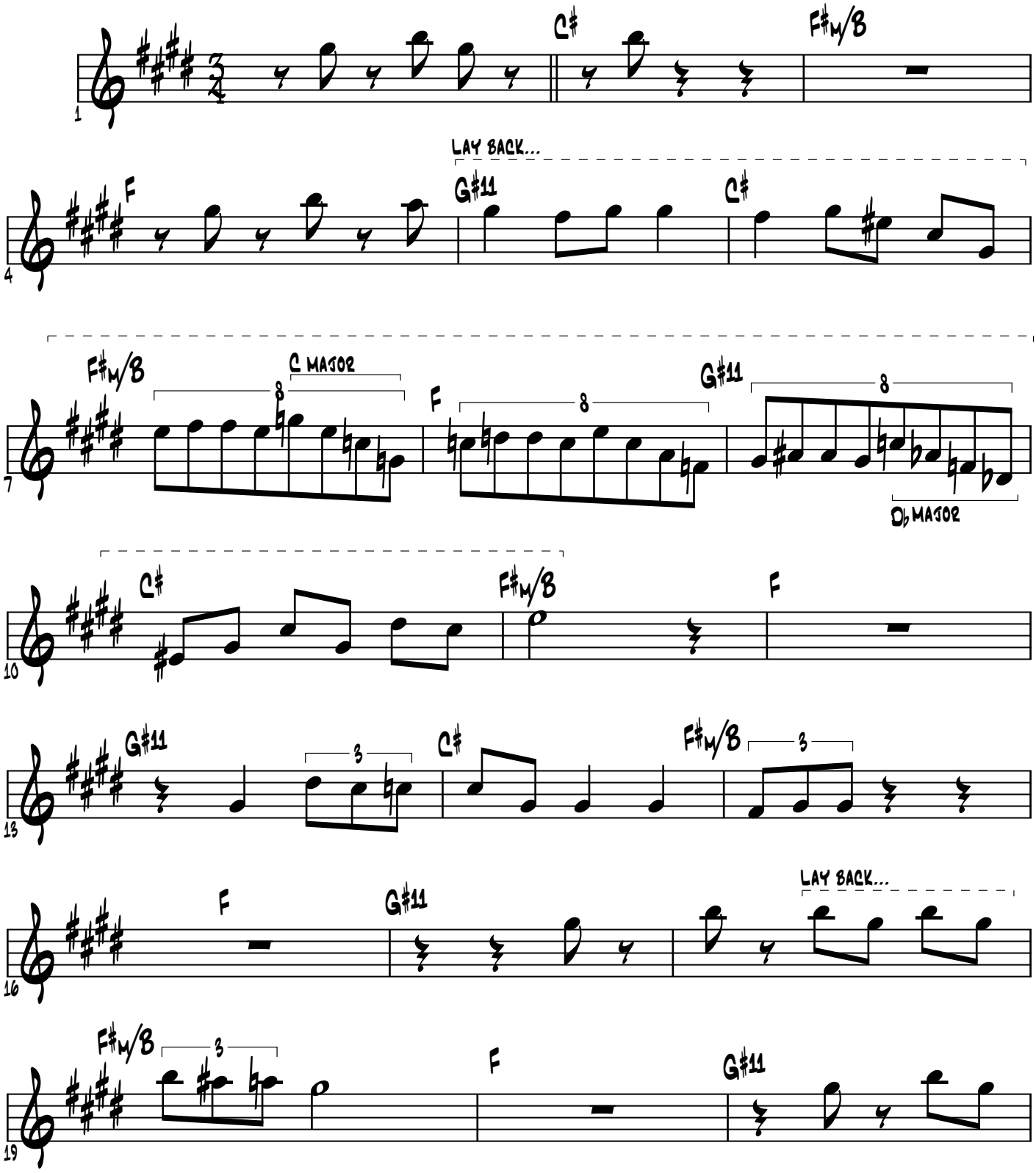
5M10s-5M33s



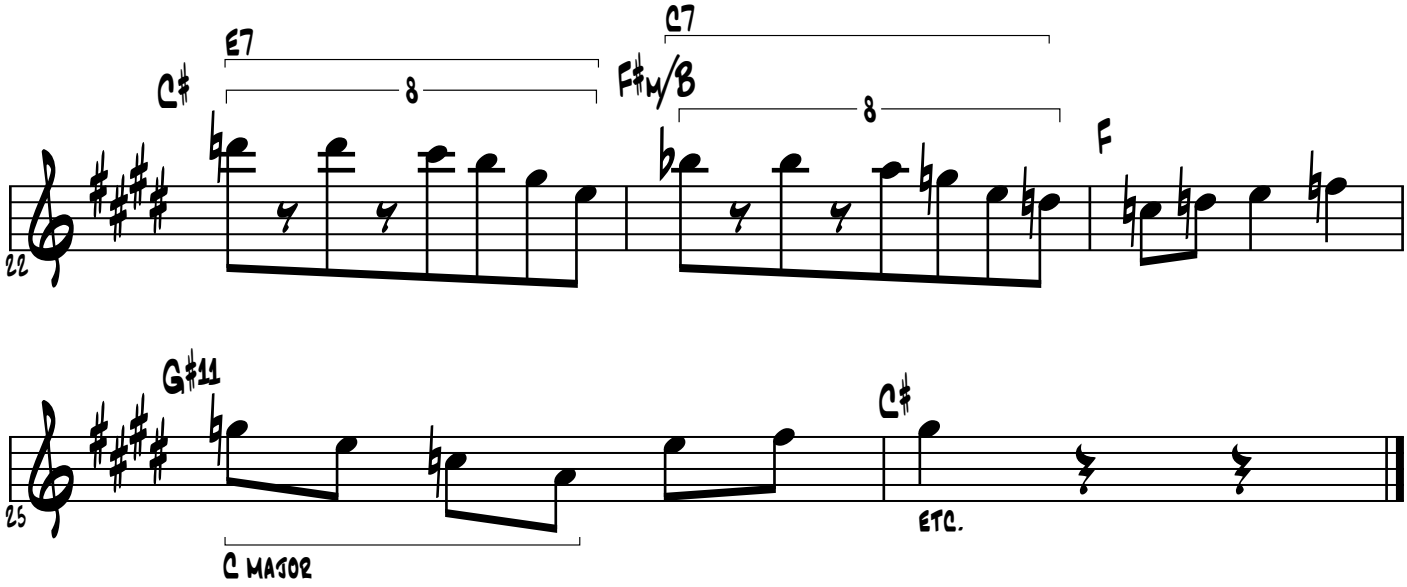
Appendix 4

Shes Leaving Home Solo

7M06s-7M39s

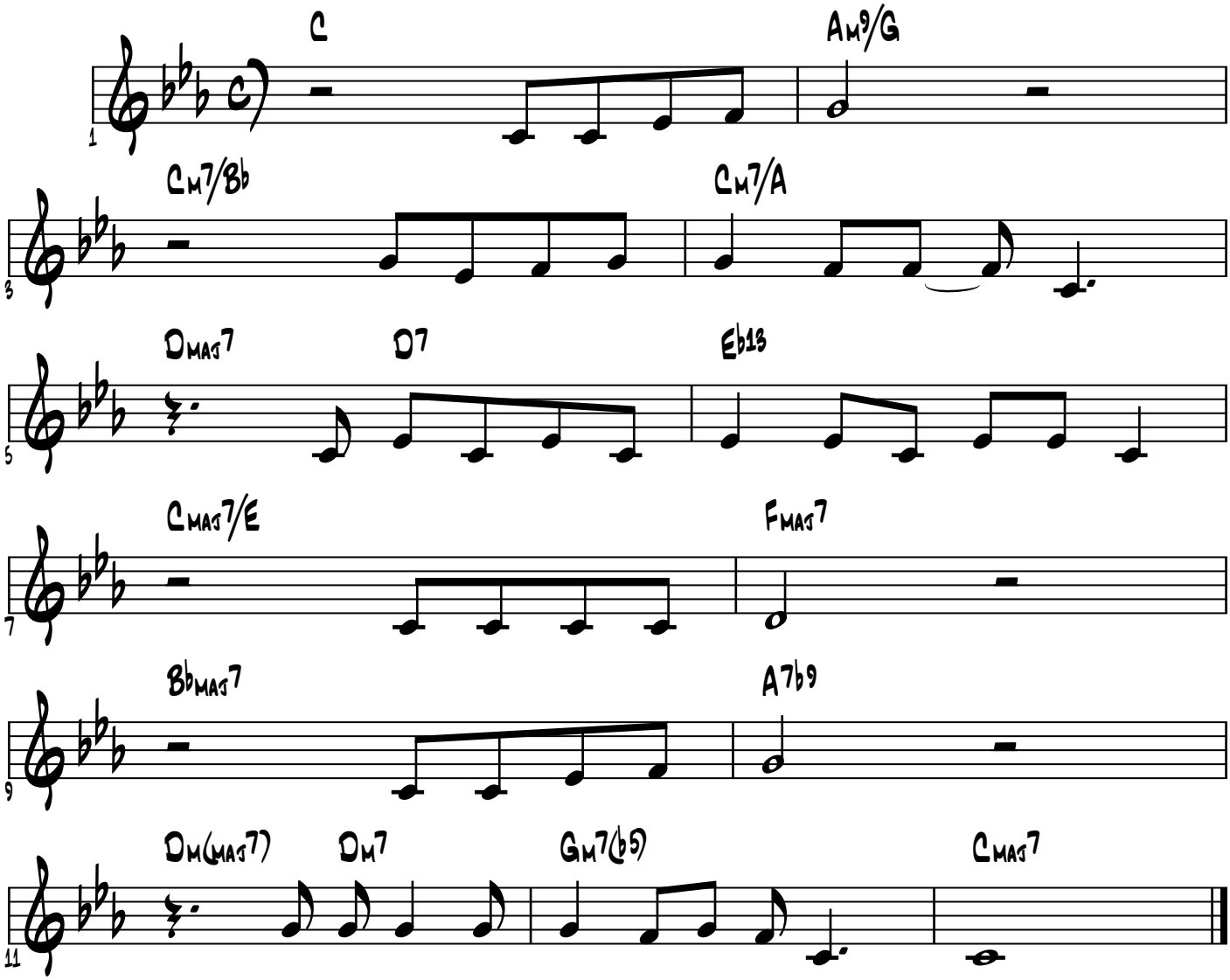


SHESLEAVINGHOMESOLO/2



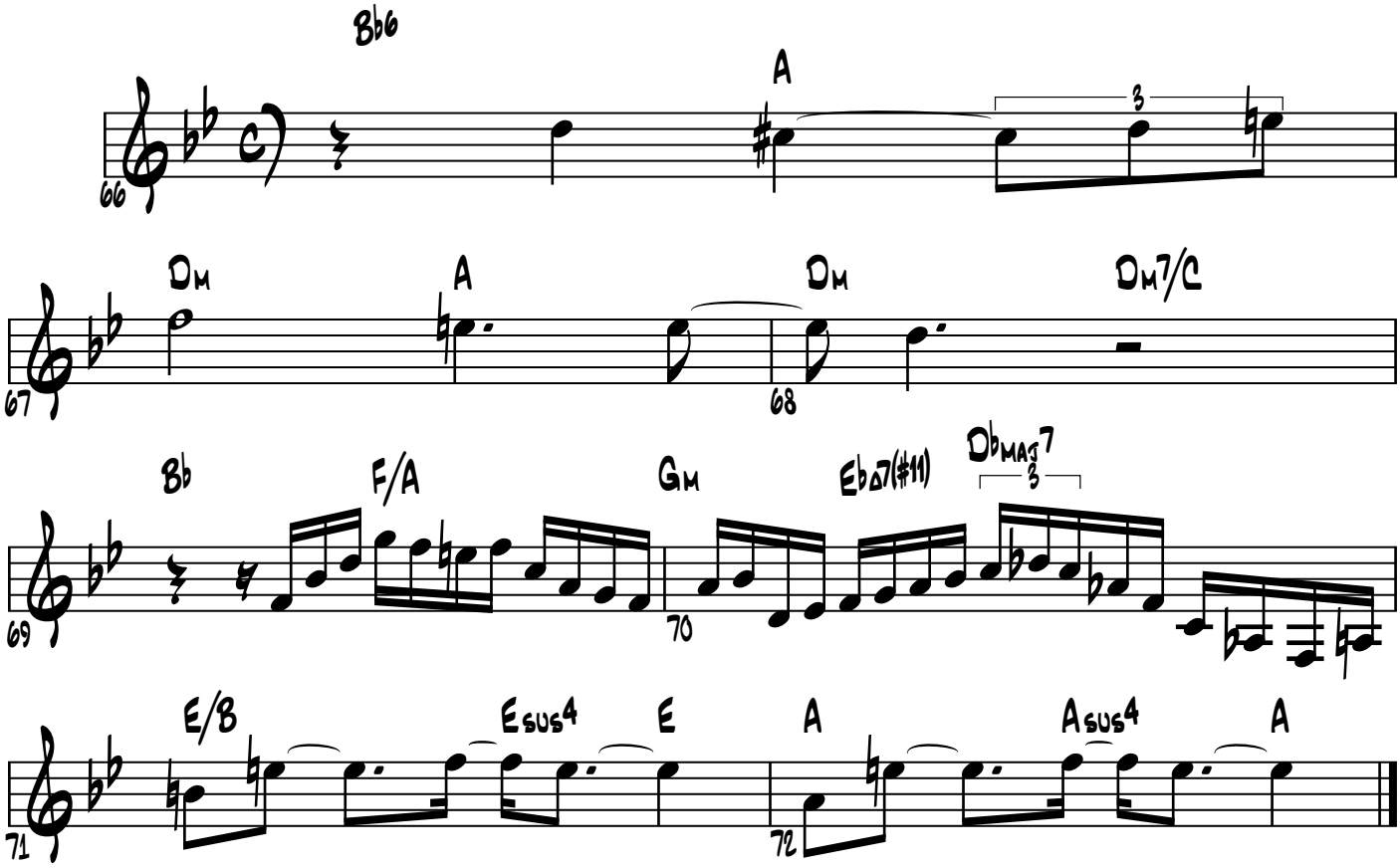
DAY IS DONE REHARMONISATION

6M34S-7M0S

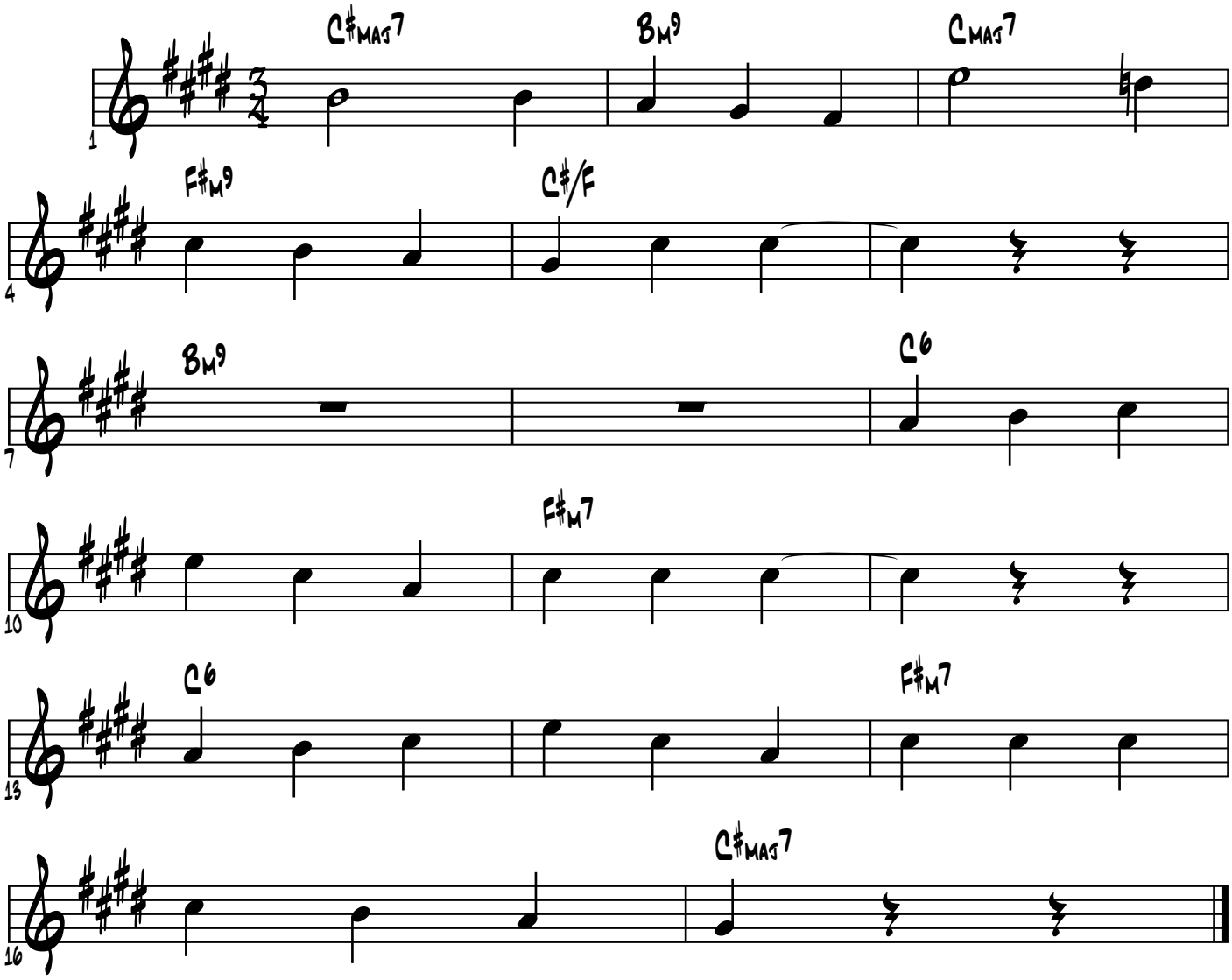


Paranoid Android Reharmonisation

5m21s-5m46s



Appendix 7

She's Leaving Home Reharmonisation

5M05s - 5M30s